

The agro-food system in the city of Valencia, Spain. Assessment of the transformative capacity towards sustainability

The urban unsustainability problems are complex and persistent, generating new areas of research, such as studies on transition, that aim at influencing and accelerating the processes of change towards sustainability. In agro-food system, citizens have also reacted to the failure of the current system by challenging it with creative initiatives, self-organization, resistance and a growing demand for change that has had a strong mark on food policies in Valencia in the last years. As of 2015, Valencia has developed a transformation process in food policies through a participative transdisciplinary effort which has resulted in producing the Valencia 2025 Agri-food Policy Strategy, based agroecology. The purpose of this paper is to inquire into the potentialities of the urban transformative capacity framework, based on the work of Wolfram (2016), for the analysis and support of the sustainability transition processes in the agro-food system of the city of Valencia, Spain. The aim is to reflect on the methodological implications of applying the framework as an analytical tool of capacity for deep transition and to develop an exploratory assessment of the agro-food system to identify strategic implications for policy making, planning and research. Sustainability transition schools focus on socio-technical systems (Geels, 2004) to underline the tension between emerging niches and stabilized regimes while recognizing the important role of actors' agency (Frantzeskaki et al., 2018) and the need for reflexive governance. The present study develops an exploratory assessment the agri-food socio-technical system in the city of Valencia. Considering that it is a crucial system in terms of the urban transition singularities for Valencia, highlighting some milestones such as the signing of the Milan Urban Food Policy in 2015, the city being declared to be a World Food Capital by FAO in 2017, as well as the city's support of the Intervegas Pact in 2018. Moreover, the city is experiencing an effervescence of disruptive initiatives, and there is a balanced leadership amongst public institutions, civil society/social activism and private sector. The study is based on an interpretative research paradigm in which qualitative methods are combined, which include semi-structured interviews and analysis of secondary data. Additionally, opportunities for transdisciplinary co-production of knowledge and reflexive social learning have been created. Through this research approach, the agro-food system has been analysed, assessed and contrasted in terms of their potentialities for enabling transformation processes in the specific context of Valencia. At a research level, methodological strategies have been tested and discussed. Agro-food makes up a subsystem that links knowledge-technologies, institutions, society-culture, infrastructure and diverse ecosystem services such as water, energy and biodiversity. Thus, agro-food is particularly relevant in terms of research on territorial transformations given that it can bring together a set of sectorial subsystems in an effort to achieve systemic change.

References

Geels F (2004) From sectoral systems of innovation to socio-technical systems. Insights about dynamics and change from sociology and institutional theory. *Res Policy* 33:897–920

Frantzeskaki, N.; Bach, M.; Holscher, H.; Avelino, F. (2018). Introducing Sustainability Transitions' Thinking in Urban Contexts. En: Co-creating Sustainable Urban Futures. *Future City* 11, 63-70 pp. Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69273-9_3

Wolfram, M. (2016). Conceptualizing urban transformative capacity: A framework for research and policy. *Cities* 51, 121–130.